



May/June 2021

Xplor



FREQUENT FLYERS

XPLOR'S GUIDE TO COMMON
BACKYARD BUTTERFLIES

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Use *Xplor*'s mini field guide to discover 10 of Missouri's most common butterflies — that are anything but ordinary.

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For Father's Day, wild critters pay tribute to their top-notch pops.

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Blooming spiderwort creates a purple paradise on Wildcat Glade near Joplin. When a spiderwort's stem is sliced, a liquid flows out that hardens into a silky strand like a spider's web.

📷 by Noppadol Paothong



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Xplor (ISSN 2151-8351) is published bimonthly. It is a publication of the Missouri Department of Conservation, 2901 West Truman Boulevard, Jefferson City, MO (Mailing address: PO Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102.) Subscription free to Missouri residents (one per household); out of state \$5 per year; out of country \$8 per year. Please allow 6-8 weeks for first issue. Notification of address change must include both old and new address (send mailing label with the subscriber number on it) with 60-day notice. Preferred periodical postage paid at Jefferson City, Missouri, and at additional entry offices. **Postmaster:** Send correspondence to *Xplor Circulation*, PO Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180. Phone: 573-751-4115, ext. 3856 or 3249.

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ON THE COVER

Pipevine swallowtail

by Noppadol Paothong

GET OUT!

FUN THINGS TO DO
AND GREAT PLACES
TO DISCOVER NATURE



BALTIMORE ORIOLES BEGIN BUILDING NESTS.

It takes about a week to weave their dangly, sock-like homes.



GO BERRY PICKING.

Gooseberries, raspberries, and mulberries ripen in June.



AMERICAN TOAD

tadpoles turn into toadlets and leave the water.



Xplor SUMMER FUN AT AN MDC NATURE CENTER.

Visit short.mdc.mo.gov/Zpg to find the center nearest you.

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR BLACK BEARS

if you live in the Ozark region. They're browsing for berries, too.



WHAT IS IT?

DON'T KNOW?
Jump to Page 21 to find out.



- ❶ My stems look like paddles.
- ❷ My leaves are mere bumps.
- ❸ My spines foil pickers ...
- ❹ ... who still spread my stickers.



Into the WILD vegetable garden

People aren't the only animals that love homegrown veggies. Wild critters — some big, most small — also adore the garden.



Planting flowers in your veggie garden — especially native wildflowers — is a great way to attract bees and butterflies. These hard-working insects will pollinate your plants, which will help your garden make more vegetables.

Take a Closer Look

The next time you sniff a flower, a sneaky hunter may be hiding right under your nose. Crab spiders don't weave webs to catch prey. Instead, they patiently wait on flowers and rely on camouflage to stay hidden. When a fly buzzes by, the spider pounces.



What's covered in warts, eats bugs, and comes out at night? It's a toad, and you can invite these helpful amphibians to live in your garden by building a toad abode. Place a chipped clay pot upside down on the ground and top it with dirt or moss to keep it cool inside.



LOOK

Snakes and other reptiles sometimes soak up the sun in vegetable gardens. Though they may startle you, they're actually a gardener's best friend because they eat rodents and other garden pests.



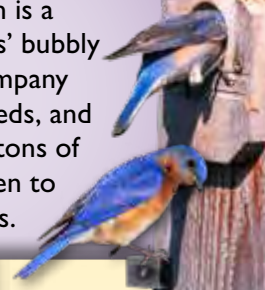
Speckled kingsnake



You might think all bumblebees are the same. But Missouri has more than 10 different kinds of these fuzzy, buzzy insects. To learn how to tell one from another, buzz over to **MoBumble** beeAtlas.org.



Putting up a bluebird box or wren house near your garden is a fantastic idea. The birds' bubbly songs will keep you company while you're pulling weeds, and parent birds will pluck tons of insects from your garden to feed their hungry chicks.



Take a Closer Look

To gather pollen from plants like tomatoes and peppers, bumblebees use "buzz pollination." First, a bee clamps down on a flower with its jaws. (The bite marks are called "bee kisses.") Then the bee vibrates its flight muscles, which causes a loud buzz. The buzz travels through the flower and shakes out pollen like salt from a shaker.



What Happened Here?

The back of this tomato-munching caterpillar is covered with cocoons. Inside each cocoon is a tiny baby wasp. The baby wasps eat the caterpillar's insides as they grow. When the babies turn into adults and buzz away, the caterpillar dies.



LOOK

Eastern cottontails may hide their babies in overgrown rows of vegetables. A waist-high fence made of chicken wire will usually keep mama rabbit and her hungry bunnies separated from your lettuce and carrots.

BACKYARD BUTTERFLIES

by Bonnie Chasteen

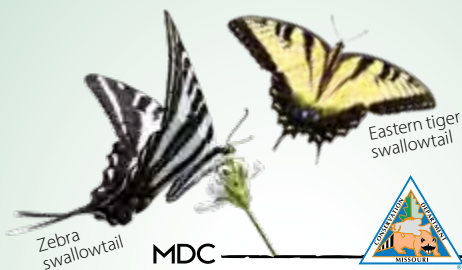
USE XPLOR'S MINI
FIELD GUIDE TO
DISCOVER 10
OF MISSOURI'S
MOST COMMON
BUTTERFLIES — THAT
ARE ANYTHING BUT
ORDINARY.



What's your favorite butterfly? The big, bold pipevine swallowtail? Or maybe the tiny tailed-blue? Whatever their size, butterflies are basically insects. They have six legs and two pairs of wings. But everything from their life cycle to their eye-popping beauty makes them seem like magical creatures from another realm. Let's get to know 10 Missouri butterflies you're likely to see enchanting your backyard this summer.

But First, Make This Field Guide

- 1 Cut out the next two pages along the dotted lines.
- 2 Fold each cutout down the middle.
- 3 Stack the cutouts with the pages in numerical order.
- 4 Staple the cutouts together along the middle between pages 8 and 9.
- 5 You're ready to search for butterflies!



Zebra swallowtail

Eastern tiger swallowtail



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YOU DISCOVER BUTTERFLIES



Great spangled fritillary

A MINI FIELD GUIDE TO 10 LOVELY LEPIDOPTERA

CABBAGE WHITE



Your parents may complain about this butterfly's caterpillars, which gobble up garden cabbages. But the adult is a nectar-sipping pollinator, so it helps out in the garden, too.



Accidentally introduced from Europe more than 100 years ago, this winter-hardy butterfly is one of the first to appear in spring.

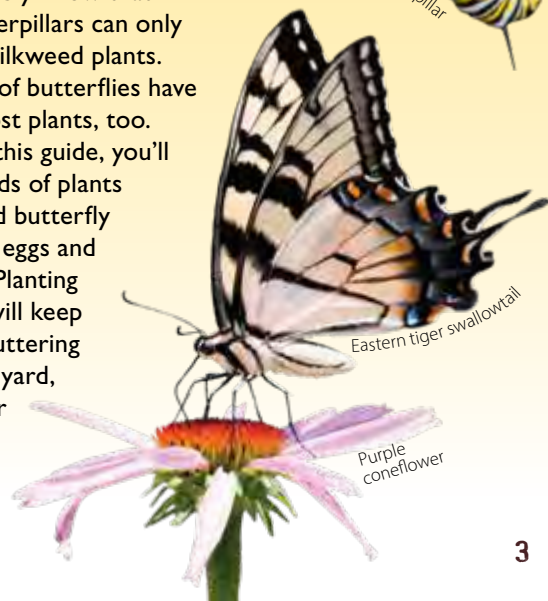
PICKY ABOUT PLANTS

Bet you didn't know this: Butterflies can taste with their feet! Why? So they know immediately what kinds of plants they've landed on. This helps them quickly find the kind of host plants their eggs and caterpillars need to thrive.

You probably know that monarch caterpillars can only survive on milkweed plants. Other kinds of butterflies have their own host plants, too. Throughout this guide, you'll learn the kinds of plants each featured butterfly needs for its eggs and caterpillars. Planting host plants will keep butterflies fluttering around your yard, summer after summer.



Monarch caterpillar



Eastern tiger swallowtail

Purple coneflower

SCALED FOR FLIGHT

Butterflies and moths belong to a group of insects called Lepidoptera (leh-puh-dahp-tehr-uh). This means “scale wing.” Scales are the colored “dust” that rubs off on your fingers when you touch a butterfly’s wing. These scales protect and insulate the beautiful bugs and help the flow of air along their wings as they fly.



MORE THAN MONARCHS MIGRATE

Monarchs are famous for flying from central Mexico to Canada and back every year. Turns out some other kinds of butterflies fly south for the winter, too, although not as far.

How do other butterflies survive winter? They stay snug in their eggs or cocoons, often nestled in leaf litter. This is why it’s important to leave fall leaves in your yard until spring. Last fall’s leaves may harbor this spring’s butterflies!



Monarchs in Mexico



Spicebush swallowtail chrysalis in winter

© Charles Shapiro | Dreamstime.com

2

CLOUDED SULPHUR



Adults are easy to please and will sip nectar from clovers, milkweeds, dandelions, and thistles. Caterpillars love peas, beans, and clover.



These wide-spread pollinators are on the menu for birds and other insect-eaters.

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Clouded sulphur caterpillar: Kevin Collison / Shutterstock.com

MASTERS OF CHANGE

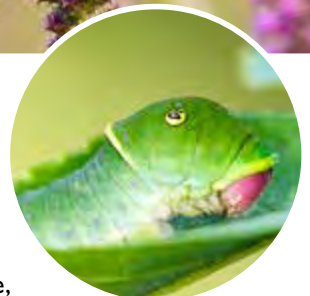


A butterfly starts life as a tiny egg laid on or near a particular kind of plant. After a few days, a hungry little caterpillar pops out. It chomps and chomps its host plant, growing and changing its appearance until it’s a mature larva. Then it attaches to a twig or other sturdy structure and sheds its skin. The remaining soft body forms a protective shell called a chrysalis or a cocoon.

EASTERN TIGER SWALLOWTAIL



Adults sip nectar from blazing star, buttonbush, and other blooming plants. Look for the bright green caterpillars on apple, cherry, and tulip trees.



When disturbed, the tiger swallowtail caterpillar rears back and sticks out a stinky, orange, forked gland that puts off predators.

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4

BLACK SWALLOWTAIL



Adults visit just about any kind of flower and often sip moisture from mud puddles. Look for eggs and caterpillars on members of the carrot family, including dill.



Some gardeners plant extra dill to keep black swallowtails from laying eggs on their carrot plants.

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Inside the chrysalis, the larva turns to goo. Over the next several days, different groups of cells change the goo into eyes, wings, and other adult body parts. When it's ready, the butterfly wriggles out. It pauses, letting its wet, wrinkled wings "bloom" into their final shape. Then, it flies off to find a mate and start its life cycle — known as metamorphosis (*met-uh-more-fo-sis*) — all over again.



5

SACHEM SKIPPER



This grass-loving butterfly is common in late summer. You might see its dark green caterpillars in lawn grasses.



Skippers are a kind of butterfly named for their skipping flight.

COMMON BUCKEYE



Daisies, milkweeds, and mints attract the adults, and caterpillars feed on many kinds of plants, including the common plantain, which grows in nearly everyone's yard.



Like monarchs, these butterflies and their caterpillars harbor yucky-tasting toxins from their host plants.

10

7

AMERICAN LADY



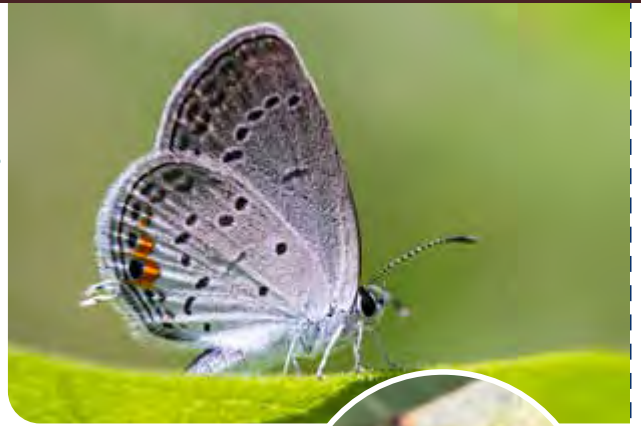
Adults love thistles and other flowers but will also sip tree sap and the juices of rotting fruit — yum! Caterpillars live inside tents they build out of silk and eat leaves of sunflower-family members.



When seeking mates, American lady males will defend their territories against other males.

6

EASTERN TAILED-BLUE



Common in prairies and yards, adults flutter low to the ground looking for small flowers to sip. Caterpillars feed on the flowers, seeds, and leaves of clovers.



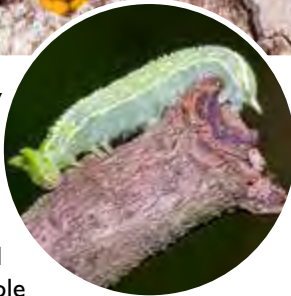
Adults spend the night in places where they basked in the sunlight.

11

HACKBERRY EMPEROR



While the hackberry tree may host this butterfly's caterpillars, the adults have a taste for salt and may land on your arm to sample your sweat. But don't feel too special. Other favorite flavors include animal droppings and mud.



The forked features on the caterpillar's head resemble miniature deer antlers.

8

MONARCH



Watch for adults flitting among milkweeds, asters, and sunflowers. Check milkweed stems and leaves for tiny white eggs or striped caterpillars.



Keep monarchs coming back to your yard every year by planting native milkweeds. Check for local native plant sales at **GrowNative.org**.

9

Thanks, Dad!

Wild critters don't make Father's Day cards for their top-notch pops. But what if they did? Here's what they might say ...

by Matt Seek

Dear Dad,

No other animal hunts so hard to find food for his family. I've watched you wiggle into narrow nooks to nab rodents, scamper up trees to inspect bird nests, and dive underwater to catch fish. You're an all-terrain predator, Pops! Even when you're exhausted from hunting, you still find the strength to carry me if I'm too tired to walk. But my favorite is when you let me ride on your back when you go swimming!

Love, Little
American Mink



Dear Pop,

Most kids love piggyback rides from their dad, but you go the extra mile. Ever since Mom glued her eggs to your back — all 150 of them! — you've been carrying us around wherever you go. Staying on the move makes it hard for pesky predators to eat us. In a few weeks, I'll hatch and swim away forever. But before I do, I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate you!

Love, Little Giant
Water Bug

That's
me!





Dear Dad,

Keeping Mom fed while she sat on our nest must have been a ton of work. After all, she's about a third bigger than you! And when my brothers and sisters and I hatched, you had even more hungry beaks to feed. But I love watching you dive from high in the sky — WHOOSH! — to knock unsuspecting birds out of the air for our dinner.

Love,
Little
Peregrine
Falcon



Dear Pa,

I know most furry fathers don't stick around to raise their kids. But I'm glad you did. Mom needs all the help she can get! She keeps having babies. There were five in my litter, and we were her third litter this year! I like when you help her groom me and carry me by the scruff of my neck when we move to a new nest.

Love, Little
Prairie Vole



Dear Father,

You're the best actor I know! If a hungry coyote gets too close to our nest, you skitter away and pretend to have a broken wing. You put on quite an act, thrashing about and dragging your wing. The gullible coyote thinks it's going to score an easy meal, but all the while, you're leading it far from me and the other chicks. When we're out of danger, your wing magically "heals," and you fly away to safety. Bravo, Father!

Love, Little Killdeer

AWWW...
I was so
cute!





Dear Papa,

Most humans think only mama mammals make milk. But I know that's not true. Ever since I hatched, you've been feeding me milk. And it's good that you do. Mom can't make enough for me and my sister! When I'm hungry, I stick my beak inside yours and a yummy liquid flows down my throat. It comes from your crop, that pouch at the end of your food tube. It must be good for me. My feathers are already starting to sprout!

Love, Little Mourning Dove



Dear Dad,

I know you were worrying about my safety long before I was born. Why else would you build 12 different nests and only use one of them? Mom says the extra nests are decoys to keep predators from finding our real home. I hope they work! Thanks for doing so much to keep our family safe.

Love, Little Sedge Wren

Peregrine falcons: Markus Varesvuo / Naturepl.com; Prairie vole: Yva Momatikuk and John Eastcott / Mindenpictures.com; Mourning dove: Robert M. Vera / Alamy Stock Photo; Coyote: Geoffrey Kuchera / Dreamstime.com

Howl's it going, Pop?

You're such a playful parent I couldn't pass up the chance to crack a joke. I'm glad you play with me so much. When you let me pounce on your back and chew on your ears, I know you're helping me get stronger and training me to catch prey, like rodents and rabbits. Yum! I can't wait to go hunting with you, so I can try out everything you've taught me.

Love, Little Coyote





Dear Dad,

You make plunging beak-first into a stream look easy! But diving for dinner is hard. And scary! I didn't want to do it at first. But I was soooo hungry! When you dropped that dead minnow into the water, I didn't even think about it. My rumbling tummy took over, and I just aimed my beak at the fish, folded my wings, and ... dived. Thanks for being such a patient teacher.

Love, Little Belted Kingfisher

Dear Daddy,

I know you've had your wings full since Mom left. For most bird families, mom and dad work together to raise babies. You've had to do it all by yourself. You finished building the nest. You sat on the eggs. You stretched out your wings to shield us from hot sun and cold rain. Each day, you lead us to the shoreline and keep a lookout for danger so we can skitter about, snapping up yummy insects. It must be hard being a single parent, and I want you to know how much I appreciate everything you do.

Love, Little Spotted Sandpiper



Dear Papa,

I know people call you all sorts of not-nice names, like devil dog and snot otter. But to me, you'll always be a devoted dad. Would people call you names if they knew how hard you fought with other hellbenders to win this rock we live under? Or that you guarded Mom's eggs and the babies that hatched from them for nearly two months? If they knew you like I do, I bet they'd change your name to "super salamander"!

Love, Little Hellbender

Hey Dad, remember when I was this small!?!?



Dear Pa,

After using your tail to sweep out a nest for Mom's eggs, you went a fin further. You stood guard over our nest to protect me and my siblings from schools of egg-slurping sunfish. And you swished your tail over us — over and over again — to keep algae from growing and provide plenty of oxygen for us to breathe. Thanks for being a fin-tastic father!

Love, Little Catfish



Dear Father,

Thanks for working so hard to bury this dead bird that we live on. I heard it took you nearly a whole night of digging! And thanks for feeding me meat from the bird when I get hungry. It's nearly unheard of for an insect to care for its young. It's even rarer for both parents to pitch in. I guess you and Mom aren't so ordinary!

Love, Little American Burying Beetle

Dear Pops,

When I grow up, I hope I'm as brave as you! While Mom sat on the nest, you stayed a few waddles away to keep her safe. If a fox or raccoon wandered too close, you scared it away with angry hisses and honks. Once our little flock of fuzzy goslings hatched, you and Mom herded us to a nearby marsh where the water kept us safe from predators.

Love, Little Canada Goose



THIS
ISSUE:

illustrated by
David Besenger

AMERICAN REDSTART VS. PLANTHOPPER

Jump Scare

A redstart fans its wings and tail to expose Halloween-colored feathers. The sudden flash of color startles insects and flushes them out of hiding.

Pop and Hop

When spooked, a planthopper makes an explosive hop, rocketing out of reach from snapping bird beaks.

Leaf Lookalike

The leaflike veins and green color of a planthopper's wings make the sneaky bug all but invisible as it crawls along a leaf.

Tweezer Beak

A sharp beak helps the hungry bird pluck insects from leaves while netlike whiskers funnel flying bugs into its mouth.

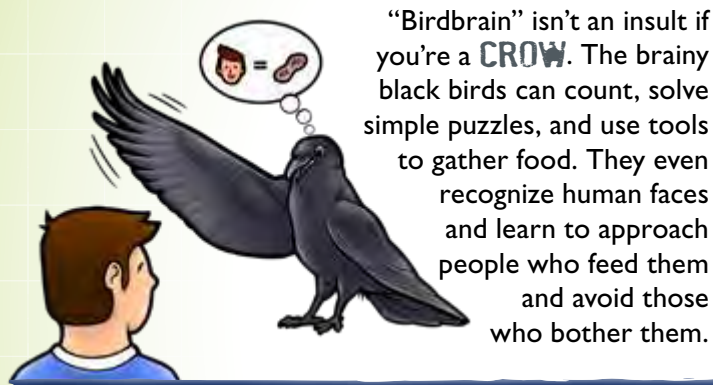
AND THE WINNER IS...

The agile redstart hops quickly from branch to branch, flicking its flashy feathers to flush planthoppers from hiding. Some of the bugs pop off to safety. But many end up in the bird's belly.

STRANGE but TRUE!

YOUR GUIDE TO ALL THE
UNUSUAL, UNIQUE,
AND **UNBELIEVABLE**
STUFF THAT GOES ON IN NATURE

FIREFLIES flicker to attract a boyfriend or girlfriend. But biologist believe their flashing backsides have another purpose: The blinking may serve as a signal to hungry bats that the firefly is toxic and shouldn't be eaten.



"Birdbrain" isn't an insult if you're a **CROW**. The brainy black birds can count, solve simple puzzles, and use tools to gather food. They even recognize human faces and learn to approach people who feed them and avoid those who bother them.

CLIFF SWALLOWS gather mouthfuls of mud — but not to eat. (That would be gross.) The birds use the blobs to build nests on bluffs, bridges, and barns. It takes about 1,000 beakfuls of mud — and as many flights to the mud puddle — to finish a single nest.

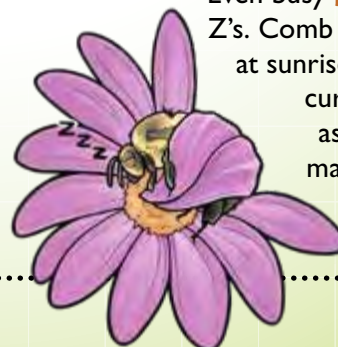


EASTERN COACHWHIPS can slither swifter than any snake in the Show-Me State. Compared to humans, their top speed of 3.5 mph isn't impressive. But they're quick enough to outrun — oops, out-slither — all but the fastest predators and prey.



Once it forms its protective cocoon, a **CATERPILLAR'S** body quickly dissolves into a gooey soup of cells and proteins. Special cells act like a recipe book to remix the goo and form legs, wings, antennae, and other butterfly body parts.

Now you see me. Now you don't. **GRAY TREEFROGS** have a handy trick to hide from hungry hunters. The snack-sized amphibians can change color — turning from gravel-gray to bark-brown to leafy-green — to match whatever they are crawling on.



Even busy **BEES** need to catch some Z's. Comb through a patch of flowers at sunrise, and you might find a bee curled up in the petals, sound asleep. For most species, it's male bees who sleep outside. Females usually return to the nest each night.

HOW TO

Make a Squirrel Call

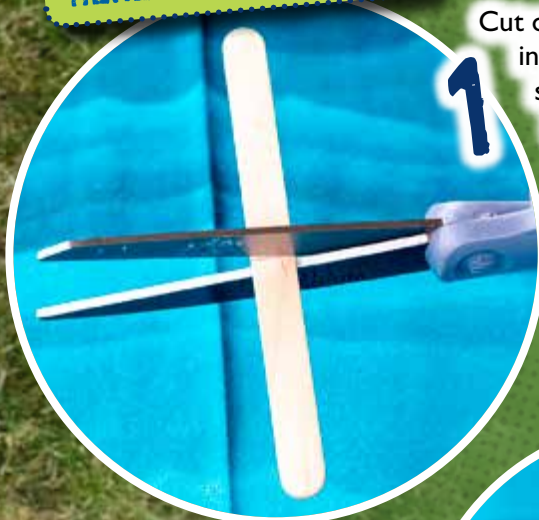
Coaxing a bushy-tailed acorn-muncher down from the treetops into viewing range is simple. Just make this easy, homemade call and learn to speak squirrel.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED

- Popsicle stick
- Measuring tape or ruler
- Marker
- Clear tape
- Plastic film (such as a clear report cover)
- Scissors
- Pocketknife (optional)
- Wood screw



HERE'S WHAT YOU DO



1 Cut or break a popsicle stick in half so that you get two sticks that are the same length. You can place the stick on the edge of a table and push down to break it. If you want a smoother edge, use sturdy scissors or a pocketknife to cut the stick in half.



2 Pull out 2 inches of tape and wrap it around one of the sticks about a quarter of an inch from the cut end. Do the same thing for the other stick.

Use scissors to cut a thin strip of plastic film about the same length and width as the sticks.



3



4

Sandwich the film between the two sticks. Be sure the film is pinched between the layers of tape.



5

Pull out 3 inches of tape. Wrap it around both sticks about a quarter of an inch from the cut ends to hold the call together.

HOW TO USE YOUR CALL

Squirrels make a variety of barks, chatters, whistles, and squeals. You can use your call to make two different squirrely sounds. Both will cause nearby squirrels to creep closer to see what's up.

Squirrel Distress Call

Squirrels make high-pitched squeals and barking calls when they're scared or annoyed. To mimic these sounds, hold the taped end of your call and blow gently between the sticks. If you don't get a sound at first, try turning the call over. Also try squeezing the taped end of the call to slightly spread the sticks apart. This will change the call's pitch. Experiment and practice, and soon you'll sound like an upset squirrel.

Gnawing Sound

When squirrels gnaw on hickory nuts, walnuts, and acorns, their teeth make a grinding sound on the nuts' shells. To mimic this sound, run the edge of the popsicle stick down the threads of a wood screw.



XPLOR MOR

CAMPING CRACK-UPS

WHOOPS!

Whoever wrote these stories left out a few words. Fill in each list, then match each answer to its corresponding number in the story.

Some answers will be used more than once.

CAMPFIRE COOKING

1. Adjective
2. Color
3. Food (plural)
4. Taste
5. Animal
6. Name of a holiday
7. Food
8. Verb ending in -ing
9. Type of tree
10. Adjective

11. Food
12. Food
13. Name of a spice
14. Color
15. Number
16. Adjective
17. Color
18. Animal (plural)
19. Body part
20. Emotion

Cooking over a campfire is (1)! My favorite meal to fix is (2) (3) with (4) sauce. It smells like wet (5), but it tastes like (6) (7).

To cook the sauce, you must build a (8) fire. Use wood from (9) trees so the fire will be (10). Add (11), (12), and (13) into a pan. Place the pan on glowing (14) coals, and stir the mixture exactly (15) times. If you stir too much, the sauce will turn (16).

Cook the (3) directly over the fire until they turn (17). If you accidentally drop the (3) in the dirt, don't worry. Just fling them into the woods for (18) to eat.

The next time you go camping, try this recipe. I guarantee it will make your (19) (20).



FUN IN THE MUD

1. Exclamation (e.g., Wow!)

2. Person's first name

3. Noun

4. Person's last name

5. Animal

6. A spreadable food

7. Loud noise

8. Body part

9. Adjective

10. Color

11. Verb ending in -ing

12. Noun

13. Adjective

14. Emotion

15. Animal sound

16. Loud noise

17. Body part

18. Color

19. Taste

20. Food

21. Number

22. Adjective

23. Animal (plural)

24. Body part

"(1)!" I turned around just in time to see my friend (2) trip over a (3) and go tumbling toward (4)'s Creek. Like a (5) greased with (6), he slid down the bank until ... (7)! He landed (8)-first in (9) (10) mud at the edge of the water.

When I quit (11), I yelled down: "Do you want me to toss you a (12)?"

"Nope," (2) yelled back. "That was (13)! You try it."

With a (14) (15), I dove down the bank. (16)! I landed (17)-first in the mud next to (2). I sat up and spit out a glob of (18) goo that tasted like (19) (20). Yum!

We must have slid down that bank (21) times. Afterward, we were covered in so much mud, we looked like (22) (23). And though I washed and washed, to this day, I still find mud in my (24).



**IF YOU WANT TO DO EACH STORY MORE THAN ONCE,
PHOTOCOPY THE PAGES BEFORE FILLING IN THE LISTS.**

WHAT IS IT?

— FROM PAGE 3 —

animals and people to pick the cactus's yellow flowers and juicy red fruits. At the same time, bristles stick to feet and fur, helping spread the cactus to dry, desertlike places statewide. Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/field-guide.

The eastern prickly pear's thick pads are actually flattened stems. Tiny, soft, cone-shaped bumps on new pads are the cactus's true leaves. At the base of each leaf bump, spines and tiny, hairlike bristles form. These make it hard for



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FREE TO MISSOURI HOUSEHOLDS

CRITTER CORNER

Swamp Milkweed Leaf Beetle



It's hard to tell if this daredevil is landing on or launching from the petals of a purple prairie coneflower. One thing's for sure — it's probably not far from a swamp milkweed plant. True to its name, it lives near, eats, and lays eggs on swamp milkweed leaves. This explains why it's marked like monarchs and other bugs that lay their eggs on bad-tasting milkweeds. They all have bright colors that warn bug-eaters to bug off! Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/field-guide.